

Appendix II: Creating Historical Scenarios

Maps and orders of battle are available for a huge number of historical actions. *Rommel's* relatively straightforward scale makes it easy to create historical battle scenarios from them. Let's take a modest example and work through the process.

Counterattack at Deir el Tarfa

In the summer of 1942, following its victory at Gazala, *Panzerarmee Afrika* pursued the British 8th army into Egypt. Rommel's first attempt to break 8th Army's lines failed in July, but by the end of August he was prepared to mount one last major offensive. German and Italian armor turned the Allied left flank almost 90 degrees and drove deep into Allied positions. On the evening of 31 August the 15th Panzer division began an assault on Alam-el-Halfa Ridge while the 21st Panzer division protected its exposed left flank. The latter, however, suddenly found itself under counterattack by the British 22nd and 23rd armoured brigades. Eighth Army's new commander, Bernard Montgomery, had held these units in reserve for precisely this contingency.

An intense tank battle ensued, as both sides committed their available airpower in support. In the end, Rommel realized that he lacked the strength (and above all, the fuel) to defeat an opponent equal in numbers of tanks, plus the entrenched infantry with their minefields and AT positions. The Axis forces withdrew the following day and the long waiting period began as Montgomery prepared his army for the inevitable attack at El Alamein.

This scenario will focus upon the fighting between 21st Panzer and the two British armoured brigades.

The Forces Engaged

There are a number of orders of battle online for the fighting at Alam Halfa ridge and the El Alamein campaign in general. We know, for example, the precise composition of tanks and infantry for the British units. We are less clear, however, on the Axis elements present.

We know that a battlegroup of the Italian *Littorio* division took part in this fighting, and that *Littorio* was equipped with Semovente 75s. I have not found, however, the precise units of that division that fought alongside 21st Panzer on that day, so I have guessed that element to be the division's Bersaglieri regiment and a battalion of Semoventes.

As for 21st Panzer, we know that they had just received some of the new Panzer IVf2s with the long-barrelled 75mm guns as well as the upgraded Panzer IIIs with the "long 50" guns. We also know that they were perilously low on fuel, so it is tempting to use the *Low Fuel* advanced rules, but I'll go ahead and give you a spoiler: during playtesting this scenario proved very close just as-is, so I decided not to hamstring the Axis player in that way.

Rating and Quantifying the Units

By the summer of 1942 the *Afrika Korps* had become something of an elite. Its two panzer divisions were very experienced, well-led, and supremely confident. Consequently I have given the German armor and motorized infantry units combat tracks of **5-4-3**.

The Italian *Littorio* division was a cut above the standard Italian leg infantry and were certainly competent soldiers. I have given them "veteran" combat tracks of **4-3-2**.

British forces at this stage of the campaign were experienced but recently defeated and demoralized and had only just had the chance to reform. I gave them also **4-3-2**.

The Axis Forces

We know that 21st Panzer had about two dozen of the new Panzer IVs at this battle, whose long 75mm guns wreaked havoc among the British armor. Consequently we'll give them two units of Panzer IVs. The rest of their tanks were Panzer IIIs. The sources indicate about 80-85 of these, so we'll give Rommel the benefit of the doubt and give him six units of these. Two battalions of motorized infantry, accounting for the chronic shortages in the *Afrika Korps*, comes to six units.

Littorio's battlegroup comprises six Bersaglieri units and three Semoventes (a battalion was present with the division, and although we can't say for certain if it fought precisely here on this day... odds are good that it did).

Finally, I have no idea what sort of artillery assets the Axis forces possessed, but it seemed reasonable to include a towed battalion for each element.

The Allied Forces

The British 22nd Armoured brigade had recently been reequipped entirely with the US-built Grant tanks. In addition to six units of these, the brigade had a motor rifle battalion (three infantry units) and a 25-pdr battery.

The 23rd Brigade used older British kit. It still had fifteen Matilda IIs and nearly 100 Valentines (these "infantry tanks" were sometimes assigned to the armoured brigades in a pinch, as was apparently done here). The brigade had also just received a battalion of infantry, the Queen's Westminsters. Thus it comprises: one unit of Matildas, seven units of Valentines, three infantry, and one 25-pdr battery.

Armor Values

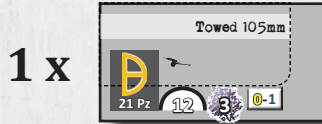
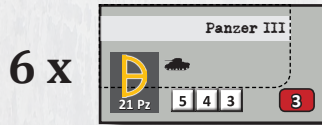
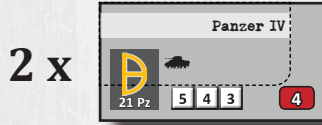
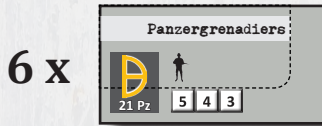
Any game set in 1942 is a mid-war scenario, so we are using values from that period. That means that the German Panzer IVs will be the most dangerous kit on the battlefield, but as usual there just aren't enough of them.

Command Posts

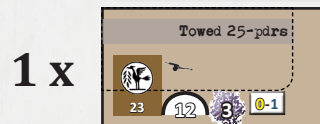
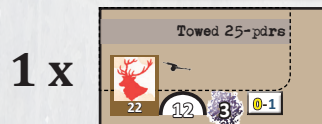
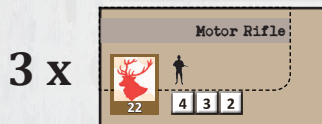
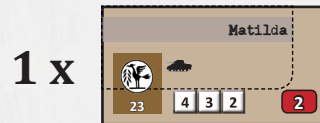
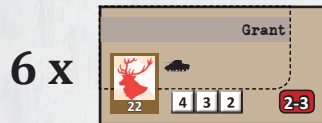
Both sides use their mid-war command posts. I have no problem letting the Italians "share" the German command post and its tactics in this scenario, since by mid-1942 the Italian armored forces had cooperated with the Germans long enough to perform at a comparable level.

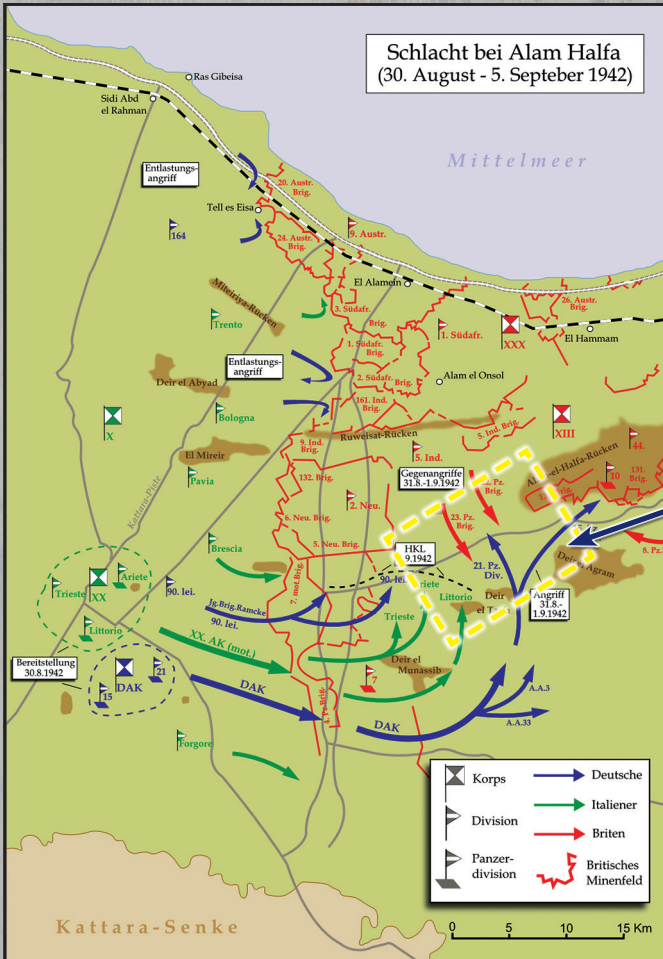
The Deir el Tarfa Order of Battle:

Axis



ALLIED





The Larger Battlefield, from the Qattara Depression to the Sea

The Battle Area for our Scenario
One table (12km x 8km)

The Battlefield

The map you see above was taken from a public-domain German Wiki page. The scale legend in the lower-right is very handy, and you can see that a standard *Rommel 6' X 4'* table with 6" squares (12 squares by 8 squares) suits our purposes perfectly, as it captures the battle area from Deir el Tarfa to the starting lines of the British armored counterattack.

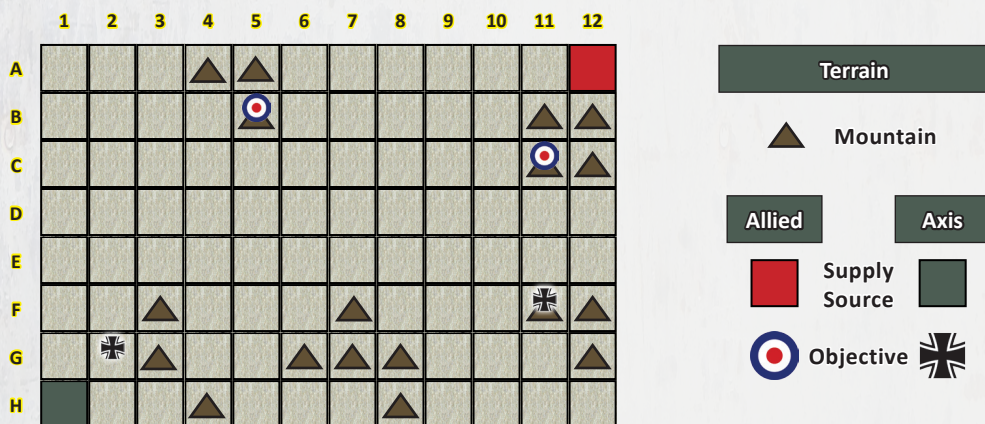
As with many battlefields in the North African campaign, there is very little terrain to speak of, except for the occasional escarpments (essentially mountainous cliffs). We will treat these as mountains. We know they weren't impassable because the infantry of both sides deployed on them.

Setting Up

On the table below, you can see that I've used mountains to represent the escarpment areas (the mountains in row G are Deir el Tarfa itself). I have placed supply sources in opposite corners, representing each side's line of communications. And I have placed four objective markers.

The British counterattack sought to halt Rommel's advance and force him to withdraw. This they did, albeit at significant cost. But the British weren't seeking to overrun a German position, rather only to prevent the Germans from advancing any further. Consequently I chose four objective markers and created a victory condition that requires the Germans to hold any three of them at nightfall. This means that the Germans not only have to take at least one British objective; they must also guard against any British counterattack that might take one of theirs. I like this incentive for a mobile battle, since everybody in this scenario is motorized and the terrain is so open.

I chose to have the Axis move first, but gave the Allies more Ops at start, as I felt this reflected the German surprise at the British counterattack.



Starting OPS:

Allied: 6; Axis: 4.

Victory:

The game has a Basic Length of 16 turns and ends at nightfall. When that happens, if the Axis side holds three objectives, it has won the game. Otherwise the Allies win.

Set Up:

The Axis player sets up anywhere in row H. Axis units begin concealed. The Allies may then set up all their units, anywhere in rows A and B. All units are then revealed.

The weather is clear. The Axis have the first turn. All units start in supply.